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The Two soldiers

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THE

TWO SOLDIERS.

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THE

TWO SOLDIERS.

TWO soldiers, Robert Wells and Isaac Clark, had obtained a three months' furlough from their colonel, to visit their relations and friends in a very distant part of England. On their return to join their regiment, which was quartered at Gloucester, having travelled till they were weary, they proposed lying by for the night at a little ale-house called the Green Dragon, near the road side. Wells observing the house was pretty much thronged with company, proposed to his companion to journey on to the next, where they might spend the night in more quiet than the present prospect of things offerred at the Green Dragon. "I'll not stir a step further to night (said Clark) for where there is good company and good liquor, there I'll make my head quarters;" so throwing his knapsack on the horse-block, down he sat himself. The Green Dragon was famous for brewing the best ale in those parts, and of course became the general rendezvous of all the five-players and skittle-players in the country; so very famous indeed was the liquor, that it introduced beggary and famine amongst the wives and children in all the neighbouring cottages. A silver-laced hat had been bowled for that evening,

and the prize was won by a young farmer, who spying our travellers, swore a tremendous oath they should drink a bumper to the king's health. After they had drunk plentifully, Wells twitched his comrade by the shoulder, and proposed that they should proceed on their march, now they had been refreshed with a friendly mug; Clark, with an oath, refused to comply, again repeating, the soldier's best head quarters was at the head of the beer barrel; "it shall never be said, Wells, that Isaac Clark was a starter, where the liquor was sound, and the company good."—"The liquor is very good, sure enough, (said Wells, who was naturally a very sober fellow) but enough is as good as a feast: and as to the company, I never beheld a worse set of drunken swearing reprobates in my life, for which reason let us on, for if we cannot make them better, they may make us worse."—"Thou art always for preaching, Bob," said Clark, "as if a body were going to die; why I was never in better health in my life; and 'tis time enough to be sorry for one's sins when the glass is out, so, Halloo, tap, bring us another pot." Thus in spite of the persuasions of poor Wells, he went on calling for another mug, and another, till he was as drunk as a beast, and his brains whirled round like the vanes of a windmill, Unhappily, in some degree, Wells fell into the same error; but unacustomed to take more than his pint, and being quite overcome with fatigue, he felt himself extremely disordered, and staggering into the fresh air, he fell flat on the grass plat, where he lay in a dead sleep all night; nor did he awake till the day was pretty far advanced, when his teeth chattered in his head, and his limbs shivered with cold, for the night was damp and misty. As soon as he was able to stand,

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he staggered in search of Clark, whom he found in a still more deplorable state, for he had continued drinking till he was as mad as the rest of his companions; they grew quarrelsome at length and each took offence at the other, till words proceeded to blows, and blows ended in blood; for a very profligate young butcher struck his neighbour the shoemaker such a violent blow across the head with a quart pot, that his skull was fractured; this unlucky circumstance brought the landlord to interfere, who was alarmed for the honour of his house, or to speak truly, the fear of losing his licence at the next sessions; so he very prudently sent for a surgeon, whilst the rest of the joyous crew made their escape for fear of falling into the hands of justice.

Our travellers left the Green Dragon, Clark's head was still too confused with liquor to permit him to think; but Wells, who was now quite come to himself, was overcome with shame; and inwardly vowed, that if the entertainment he met with at the Dragon was called a merry making, he would never desire to be merry again for the rest of his days; for what good have we obtained by it, said he, but empty pockets, bloody noses, aching bones, and the rod of justice hanging over our heads? Besides, what is still worse, muttered he to himself, by being overtaken in liquor, we have lost our reason, which was the gift of God, and was given man as a precious token of his favour, to distinguish him from the brute beast that perisheth. Clark as they journeyed on, was spiteful, sullen, and sulky: now and then muttering, that spite of the past he would get good ale wherever it was to be had. "And I," said Wells, "would make a vow to drink water for the rest of my days rather than ever make

myself a beast again, for I have a character to maintain, and a soul to be saved."—"And I'll tell thee, Bob, what is my design," rejoined Clark, "to swim in strong beer whenever I can find it, if poverty and death both stared in my face."—"Thou talkest like a bold fellow," said Wells, "and yet thou mayest tremble when death comes in sight: prithee where dost think to go when thou diest?"—"I have never once thought about dying, Bob, I assure thee."—"Then it is best thou shouldest begin, Isaac, for 'in the midst of life we are in death,' as I heard the parson say at my grandfather's funeral. Time too is short when measured against eternity, and if we make in the spring great preparations for a summer's campaign in the army, what constant preparations ought we not to be making for death! We soldiers, Isaac, should be particularly careful to keep our accounts between God and our souls very short, since at the beat of the drum on the day of battle, ten thousand may rush in a moment into eternity! and the best Christian then may be reckoned the boldest man. Why I would rather spend the next night in battle, for there I should be performing my duty to my king and country, than in another such a riot at the Green Dragon."—"Thou art a wishy washy fellow," replied Clark, "thou wilt never die game, if for every little offence thou art so plagued with qualms of conscience: I am determined to live my own way, Bob, come on't what will."—"Then take my word for it," said Wells, "thy ruin is not far off; for though in a fit of bravery thou mayest appear to shake off the fear of God, the Devil may get up thy indentures at the last, and the law may take hold of thee in the mean time." Then coming to a fine stream of water, Wells

stooped down, and taking up some in his hat, drank plentifully of it, saying, it cooled the fever in his stomach. Clark said he was fevetish also, but he should cool his thirst with a glass of best Hollands at the next alehouse, which they saw at some distance on the side of the hill. There however they agreed to stop; after having made a plentiful breakfast, they called for their bill, when to their great dismay they found their pockets entirely emptied of cash, except two shillings and a few halfpence, each having lost between two and three guineas, which had been given them by their friends to defray the expences of their journey. By what means they had been stripped of their cash they could not imagine, whether the landlord had made free with their pockets to pay himself, or that it had slipped out in the general scuffle; they were greatly dismayed however by their misfortune, for they had more than fifty miles to travel, and not more then tenpence left after the present expences were discharged; and when the night came on, they were compelled to seek the most comfortable lodging they could find under a haystack. "We ought not to complain of our hard fate," said Wells, "since what we are about to suffer is but part of the punishment due to our folly. With sobriety, and good management, our money would have enabled us to travel comfortably, and at the end of our journey we should have had plenty to spare, to have given a treat to our comrades, who have been often kind to us on a like occasion."—"I'll never return to the regiment to be laughed at," said Clark, mutteringly, "I am almost famished to death—I'll desert."—"Prithee, Isaac," said Wells, "look well to thy words, and before thou a-

tempted to commit a great sin, ask thyself, how thou shalt like to bear the punishment when thou art found out; and if thou shouldst escape being brought to justice while on earth, it will find thee out in the day of judgment. Take my word for it, he is the only free, and I may add, happy man, who is always doing the work of him that made him. Talk no more of desertion then, dear Isaac, let us bear our misfortune like men, and as our catechism says, patiently resolve to do "our duty in that state of life unto which it hath pleased God to call us."

"When I was a child, Bob," said Clark, "I never learnt my catechism; learning, which I have heard thee say, has kept thee out of many scrapes, I hated; for I was a boy of spirit, I loved boxing, five playing, and robbing of orchards a deal better than my book."—"So much the worse for thee, Isaac; a sober education to a poor man will keep him on in the world much more creditably than a little estate without it; for laziness and drunkenness will soon bring a pretty property to nothing, and thou mayest have heard that

'When land is gone and money spent,
'Then learning is most excellent.'

"Honesty is the best policy, Isaac, and a good name is better than great riches. Think no more of deserting then, thou hast taken the King's money and a strong oath to serve him faithfully, take care then that thy redcoat be not stained with black spots. Consider we are all GENTLEMEN soldiers, then let us not disgrace ourselves by carrying the bloody marks of the rod of correction on our backs; if thou art resolved to behave so as to deserve punishment, don't murmur against the laws which must inflict it. The laws, Isaac, are only

made to protect honest men from the snares of villains. Courage man, don't despair of finding a breakfast in the morning, may hap we may meet with some good charitable well disposed people to whom we will relate our misfortune, and our disgrace, for I shan't be ashamed to ask for bread now my folly has reduced me to ask for it."—"This is fine talking," replied Clark, "do as thou wilt, Bob, but my pride is above it, in this beggarly starved condition I'll never join the regiment to be sneered and jeered at by every one; so I am resolved to have my own way for once."—"Then remember, Isaac, 'tis a dangerous thing for a man to give himself up to the evil of his ways; I am only talking to thee for thy good, and since thou art determined to have thy own way in every thing, I will only further advise thee to think how thou can'st bear punishment, before thou committest a sin which will sooner or later bring down the vengeance of the law against thee. Have a good heart, man, pluck up, that we may be able to begin our march by break of day, and as I said before we may meet with some kind assistance on the road; this is a charitable land, Isaac, and there are few people in it who are not ready to relieve distress, when it is known to be real; and if we should be repulsed at a surly door, we must not be angry and unforgiving, since the kind hearts of the wealthy are so often imposed upon by false stories of misfortunes, that it often shuts up their bowels of compassion when real misery stands before them. Man's nature, Clark, becomes suspicious when it has often been imposed upon. My pride now is to meet our regiment before the time of our furlough is expired, it will give us great credit with our

colonel, who is the very best of men, and who seeing that we have made a generous use of the power intrusted to us, will not be afraid to indulge us again, at a fit time. For seven years that I have been in the regiment, I have never received an ill word or an unkind look from my officers, because I always made it my pleasure to do my duty."—"My pleasure then," replied Clark, "is to have my own way; I don't care a rush for any man—I don't care for the general—I don't care for the colonel—nor I don't care for he captain—so I have made up my mind as to that matter—I'll have food whilst I can eat it—drink when I can get it—and money and pleasure wherever I can find them."—"Clark, thou dost make me tremble sadly," said Wells, "to hear thee talk so desperately do turn thy thougths towards God, for there seems to be a strong temptation upon thee—humble thyself before him, tell him thou art a miserable sinner, and beg his mercy to assist thee in thy distress, don't go on adding sin to sin; we have been both guilty of an henious fault; let us take this lesson of instruction out of it, and resolve to do so no more. My father was an honest labourer, and he used to tell all his children that drunkenness was sure to bring three evils to every labouring man, namely, *sickness*, *hunger* and *rags*; besides, no sin makes the heart so hard as drunkenness. A drunkard is without pity, since he can behold his wife and children dying of famine, because his own beastly appetite must have its fill of liquor at the village ale-house."—"Thou art preaching to a d—t man," interrupted Clark, "I'll have my own way, I tell thee again and again; it is time enough to rail against pleasure when one has no power left

to enjoy it."—"Thou wilt live to repent thy sayings, take my word for it," said Wells, "for my part I would rather eat a hard crust for my dinner, than dine with the officers on roast beef and plum pudding, if I must do dirty work to obtain it."—"I would dine with any man," said Clark "who would give me a dinner, and drink with any man that would offer me his cup, though perhaps he did expect a little underhand business of me in return; I am resolved to serve myself, Bob, and there is an end of my chapter."—"And a sorrowful ending it is," answered Wells, "and so good night; (drawing some of the loose hay about him, and placing his knapsack under his head for a pillow) I shall say my prayers, Isaac, for if I am taken off in my sleep, 'tis a good thing for a man to have had his last waking thoughts employed on the goodness of God."

Wells slept sweetly till the rising sun shining on his face awakened him; he called aloud to his companion, telling him it was time to prepare for their journey; he called again, and again, but still no answer was made him; he then rose to go in search of him, but he was no where to be found. After waiting his return for near an hour, and finding he did not appear, he set forward on his journey; after travelling some miles he began to find hunger very keen, and seeing a low farm house at a distance, he struck across a field and made up to it; Wells rapped at the door, which being opened by the mistress of the house, he very modestly asked her to give him a cup of whey, or a draught of small-beer, for he was a good deal distressed.—"Distressed—aye, to be sure," said she, "the times are so hard, the world is full of distress."—"The hard-

colonel, who is the very best of men, and who seeing that we have made a generous use of the power intrusted to us, will not be afraid to indulge us again, at a fit time. For seven years that I have been in the regiment, I have never received an ill word or an unkind look from my officers, because I always made it my pleasure to do my duty."—"My pleasure then," replied Clark, "is to have my own way; I don't care a rush for any man—I don't care for the general—I don't care for the colonel—nor I don't care for the captain—so I have made up my mind as to that matter—I'll have food whilst I can eat it—drink when I can get it—and money and pleasure wherever I can find them."—"Clark, thou dost make me tremble sadly," said Wells, "to hear thee talk so desperately do turn thy thougths towards God, for there seems to be a strong temptation upon thee—humble thyself before him, tell him thou art a miserable sinner, and beg his mercy to assist thee in thy distress, don't go on adding sin to sin; we have been both guilty of an henious fault; let us take this lesson of instruction out of it, and resolve to do so no more. My father was an honest labourer, and he used to tell all his children that drunkenness was sure to bring three evils to every labouring man, namely, *sickness*, *hunger* and *rags*; besides, no sin makes the heart so hard as drunkenness. A drunkard is without pity, since he can behold his wife and children dying of famine, because his own beastly appetite must have its fill of liquor at the village ale-house."—"Thou art preaching to a d—d man," interrupted Clark; "I'll have my own way, I tell thee again and again; it is time enough to rail against pleasure when one has no power left

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ness of the times, ma'am," said Wells, "has nothing to do with my distress, since 'tis all the consequence of my own folly."—"You must be an extraordinary man, master soldier" said Mrs. Jenkins, "to confess that your own crimes have brought you to hunger."—"I tell you nothing but the truth," said Wells, "and hungry as I am, I would not impose a lie upon you to obtain the best mouthful in your house; people in general rail at the badness of the times, when nine times out of ten they owe their misery to their extravigance; two nights ago my fellow traveller and myself accidentally fell into bad company, we got drunk and we lost our money; I have a journey of more than forty miles to make, and I have not a sixpence left to furnish me with provisions."—"Follow me to the kitchen," said the good woman, "and I will give you the best my house affords, I love a soldier to my heart, because he fights for my country; but when I find a soldier to be a christian, I love him to my soul, because our country may stand a better chance to be preserved from the enemy in time of war, if our soldiers are Christians; and since, my honest friend, you han't the courage to tell a lie to God, I'm certain sure you'll never fail in doing your duty towards your country." Wells now fed heartily on some cold pork and cabbage, and drank prudently of an excellent mug of cyder that stood before him. After silently thanking the Giver of all good for a blessing he so little expected, and so little deserved, he was about to take his leave of his kind hostess, when a hustling was heard in the passage, and soon after the room was filled by a croud of people, in the midst of whom Wells saw his unfortunate comrade Clark, with his hands

tied behind him. His heart now misgave him, and it was as clear to him as the light, before it had been explained to him, that Clark had been as good as his word, and would have his own way let come on't what would. He was as pale as death, his jaws trembled, and the tears ran down his cheeks. The farmer now explained to his wife that they had taken the villain who last night would have robbed the post-chaise, but was prevented by a gentleman within it, who let fly a brace of pistols at him, which made him keep his distance; that early this morning, as he was riding to market, he himself had been attacked by him, before it was light; but some of the neighbours coming to his assistance, they determined to pursue the rogue and came up with him about two miles off, as he was entering an alehouse. I have sent to the squire's, added the farmer, to advertise the gentleman, who is at his house, that the robber is taken, and I hope he will soon be here.

Here poor Clark wept bitterly; "Ah! Bob, Bob;" said he, spying Wells, "had I taken thy kind advice I should never have been brought to this—I should have lived like a man and died like a Christian, but Lord have mercy upon me, what have I brought myself to! I have brought my life into danger, and may be have ruined my soul."—Honest Wells was grieved at heart; "O Isaac!" cried he, "could I have preserved thee from such a grievous misfortune, I would have shared my last morsel with thee; my prayers are now all I can offer thee, and by prayer only thou can'st save thyself, for the prayer of a penitent even when offered up in a prison may be accepted, if by timely repentance, Isaac, thou can'st win the favour of heaven, thou wilt find comfort under every affliction."

Here the gentleman arrived whose carriage had been stopped the proceeding evening; Clark no sooner caught a glimpse of him than he knew him to be his own colonel; a man whom every person in the regiment loved and honoured as a parent. "O my gracious father!" exclaimed Clark, "seeing this honourable gentleman enter," my punishment is already greater than I can bear, if I have offended the man I would die to serve." He then fainted away, but a little warm ale being given him, he soon recovered; when the noble colonel spoke so mildly and kindly to him, that Mrs. Jenkins put her apron to her eyes; here Wells related to the colonel what had passed; she shook like an aspen leaf when he came to relate the sorrowful adventures which befel them at the Green Dragon, and all the grief and affliction which had befallen him in consequence of it. When Wells had finished his story, "your father, Clark," said the colonel, "could not feel more concern at your present situation than I do; I have always regarded every man in my regiment as my son; for I have always tried to win their affection by kindness rather than inforce their obedience by severity. A man of true courage, Clark, abhors the thought of a base action, but if he lives without principle in his heart, he must not be suprised, if sooner or later he is betrayed by his passions into the blackest sins; and if he is taken in the commission of a crime, he must expect to pay the penalty of the law." Poor Clark groaned and wept bitterly while the colonel thus continued, "I m thankful that I wounded no man when I fired my pistols on being stopped last night in my carriage. As the night was much too dark for me to be able to give evidence as to the identity

of the person who stopped me, you may expect, Clark, that no bill of indictment will be preferred against you by me, it is a most dreadful thing for any man to take an oath, when he is not positive as to the fact he his going to swear to; the farmer I fear, from having secured your person, has certain evidence to bring against you, but that is a business in which I have no right to interfere, as your examination must take place before a neighbouring Justice of the Peace. Whether the fact be, or be not proved against you, here is a trifle to support you, in case you should get your discharge; that you may not plead your wants as an excuse for committing such a dreadful outrage against society; after what is past it will be highly improper to admit you again into the regiment; in future learn to labour with diligence, live soberly, then you will live honestly; be steady and constant in attending on all the duties which your church enjoins you; learn to fear God, honour the king, and be just to your neighbour." Tears now filled the eyes of all present, Mrs. Jenkins sobbed aloud, and every one declared, they had never heard so moving a sermon in their born days; they all said what a fine thing scholarship was when applied to christian uses, and what a pity it was the noble colonel could not be made a Bishop.

The colonel condescended to speak to Wells as kindly as if he had been his equal: "as for you, honest Robert," said he," your steady conduct has long been the subject of my observation, and my praise amongst all my brother officers; the sobriety of your life, and your regularity at church makes you always ready in the performance of your duty; I have long had it in my thoughts to pro-

cure you some promotion, without being able to obtain the means; an occasion has presented itself in your absence; Serjeant Jefferson is dead, and I have reserved his place for you; I know you can both write and cast accounts well; in this post I doubt not but you will exercise power with as much humility as you have hitherto practised obedience with chearfulness; and since this little affray has caused you much disappointment, and much delay on your journey, I will pay your fare, and your expences in the stage coach, which I find will pass this afternoon, that agreeably to your intentions you may join your regiment before the time of your furlough is expired; in order that your conduct may stand as an example to your comrades, that having been intrusted with power, you had too high a sense of duty to abuse it."

What makes the end of this little story very moving, and very instructive is, that while Wells for his honesty and good conduct was enabled by his Colonel to finish his journey by the coach, at the very moment in which he mounted the box, he saw his unfortunate comrade Clark, with his hands tied behind him, carried off to the county gaol, to take his trial at the next assizes, sorely lamenting his unhappy fate, and the wilful obstinacy that made him deaf to the excellent advice of so good a friend.

FINIS.